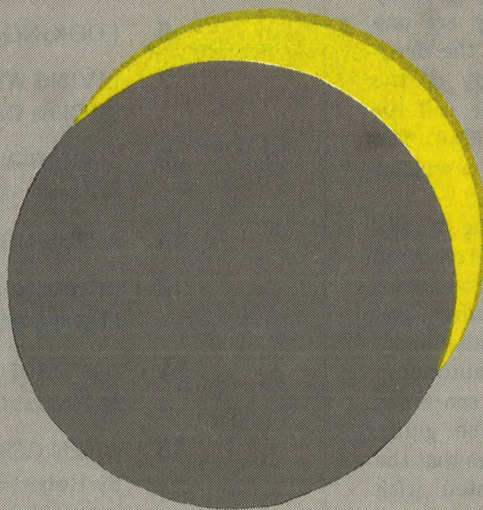


MISSION

MARCH 1979



IN THE MARGINS

SIGNS OF HOPE DEPT. I am sitting here finishing up the March issue as the last solar eclipse of the century wanes. A darkened sky is brightening now. I am moved to share some optimistic signs of spiritual light breaking in on Churches of Christ—no matter how much strain it places on my normally pessimistic veneer.

Nearly a hundred people gathered recently at one church's regular Sunday night service. The communion table was spread with enough for all, since the church usually invites everyone to participate if they wish, instead of furtively shutting off a half-dozen folk to a back room if they "were providentially hindered" that morning. It is a sign that in a special way at the Communion "they are one body." The person giving the devotional talk spoke movingly of the sacrifice of Jesus and the call for Christians to respond in kind. The fact that the presider was a woman prompted no one to leave.

Again, a journal majoring in casting folk out of the synagogue reported approvingly on the withdrawal action of one church against another. The fact that those doing so also argue strongly for congregational autonomy was not examined. Instead, space was given to the reply of the guilty church's preacher to charges that the congregation had cooperated with other believers. Such exposure unwittingly prompted an outpouring of letters to the sinful church—letters not of further criticism but of encouragement and support. "Hang in," was the word. "We're with you all the way."

And this journal, which offices at the offending church, and which came in for its share of lumps in the same publication, has had similar letters of support. (Thanks to all who wrote!)

All this gives me a refreshed spirit and renewed faith in my sometimes faltering response when I am asked, "Do you think a person can be a member of the Church of Christ and be saved?" That eclipse was the last one of the century. Despite the malingering patches of darkness, let us move on into the light.

Rd

MISSION

VOLUME 12, NUMBER 9

MARCH 1979

TO EXPLORE THOROUGHLY THE SCRIPTURES AND THEIR MEANING . . . TO UNDERSTAND AS FULLY AS POSSIBLE THE WORLD IN WHICH THE CHURCH LIVES AND HAS HER MISSION . . . TO PROVIDE A VEHICLE FOR COMMUNICATING THE MEANING OF GOD'S WORD TO OUR CONTEMPORARY WORLD."

—EDITORIAL POLICY STATEMENT, JULY, 1967

CONTENTS

- 3 FROM JUDAISM TO JESUS
- 5 LOOKING OUT 6 COMMUNION MEDITATION
- 7 LIVING WITH UNCERTAINTY
By Cline Davis
- 10 SINNER WASP
A Poem By Claude Whitcomb
- 11 A-MUSING
- 12 CHURCHES AND SECTS: HOW KING JAMES
LED US ASTRAY By Buff Scott, Jr.
- 14 THE RESTORATION OF SECULARITY
By Robert O. Fife
- 18 WHEN GOD STOOPED
By Robert J. Roe
- 19 Opinion/RSVP DIVORCE AND REMARRIAGE:
CONTINUING QUESTIONS
- 20 BOOKS 22 FORUM 23 CROSS CURRENTS
- 24 THREE SEASONS OF SPRING
A Poem By Douglas Cheaney

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From Judaism to Jesus

By NORMA

It was not an easy journey—my struggle from Orthodox Judaism to Christianity. It was filled with

walking,
stumbling,
crawling,
taking many paths with no map to follow.

I was raised in an Orthodox Jewish home. My Judaism was who I was—as inseparable a part of my being as my name. I went to Hebrew school twice a week, Sabbath school, Sunday school, and Friday night services. And I never held a pencil, played the piano, or did any other Talmudic definition of “work” on the Sabbath. Although it is not a general Orthodox practice, I had a Bat Mitzvah when I was thirteen.

I am so rich to have that heritage—a knowledge of a God who struggled with a people and called them his. My childhood memories are intertwined with the God-touches in our lives—Rosh Hashonna, Yom Kippur, Succoth,* Passover—

family times,
holy times,
awe-inspiring times.

And Jesus? He was presented to me as a Gentile prophet, a person I would never need to encounter. He was rarely mentioned; and Gentiles and Christians were an identical group to me—“goy.”

Several somewhat simultaneous events began to influence me when I was in college. I counselled at a camp for handicapped children. The directing couple served a living Jesus and a living

God. I was overwhelmed at their ability to discuss openly

their God,
their joy,
their pain.

They talked of their dead child with a spirit of thankfulness that he had been a part of their lives. That was an alien attitude to me. Death is so final in Judaism. In a religion which yearly recalls the *death* of a family member, it was spirit-boggling to see a life so celebrated—living memories instead of dry memorial services.

I began to question twentieth century Judaism, for I saw individual selectivity in deciding which laws were to be obeyed. My parents worked on the Sabbath, yet they would walk miles on Holy Days and not work. Pork was never eaten, but we would dine in un-kosher restaurants.

Where was the authority. . .

What was the authority. . .

For our legal selectivity?

One Sunday I visited Christian friends, and went to church with them. The minister read Romans 1:16: “I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes: first for the Jew, then for the Gentile.”

I was overwhelmed. For twenty-one years I had been told that Jesus was only for Gentiles. Already I was in the midst of a struggle to learn who I was, and that experience complicated my dilemma.

Over a period of time I began

to read,
to listen,

to sound out the depth of life.

Eventually I came to accept the idea that Jesus was the Son of God. I ignorantly thought that

Norma's last name is withheld out of consideration for her family. She is a member of the Southwest Church of Christ in Dallas.

was it—I was a Christian, for now I “believed” in Jesus. I assumed that my family would never know about this new belief I now possessed.

I was overwhelmed by the number of churches and denominations and varieties of theologies. In Judaism—Orthodox Judaism—there was only one choice,

one heritage,
one set of traditions,
one legal system.

I became involved in a college fellowship. One night in class we read Matthew 10. Verses 34-39 were the turning point for me. (Realize that everything I read in the New Testament was *news*, for I had heard none of it before.) Jesus was saying to me:

Do not suppose that I have come to bring peace to the earth. I did not come to bring peace, but a sword. For I have come to turn a man against his father, a daughter against her mother, and a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law. A man's enemies will be the members of his own household. Anyone who loves his father or mother more than me is not worthy of me. . . .”

I saw clearly that there was a price to be paid; and for me, that price was my family. Jesus had to be Lord,

not a doctrine but a living Savior,
not a belief but a commitment,
not a noun but a verb.

In Judaism, one's sense of identity is his children. You *are* your children. Their success reflects your worth. They are your eternal life, your foreverness. A child is always named after a deceased family member. When a male is called in Hebrew to read the Torah during a service, he is always called _____, son of _____. With that as background, my family's reaction to my new life is understandable. I merely had to say I believed there was a Jesus—that is all I said. And at that moment their “foreverness” was destroyed. Gone!

Every year since puberty my father had admonished me to “date only Jews and marry within the faith.” He would tolerate nothing else. And here I was betraying them beyond anything they had imagined. My dad's immediate reaction was to say that he would take his life if ever I went to church again. He uttered that with such emotion that I had no choice but to believe him. That moment was a taste of hell itself, for a

truth I had come to believe and love and take hold of in my life was suddenly

wrong,
a lie,
an evil,

that would destroy my family. For a short while, to me there was absolutely no God.

To explain all the events of the next year of my life would be a monumental task. I talked to rabbis, to Christians, to preachers. I climbed spiritual mountains and sank into deep, dark valleys. I received calls from relatives accusing me of trying to kill my father. I had praise for courage, when I knew I had so very little.

Gradually, God healed my family. There are many, many scars, and they have asked me never to discuss religion again. Yet they know I have a strength they do not possess. I am the one called on to sit in intensive care waiting rooms, to deal with death, to give advice.

I do not yet have it all together. I do not have all the answers to my questions. I miss my Jewish lifestyle, and at the same time enjoy the freedom and blessings of being in Christ. I see the revolutionary character of this God-Man

who made Jew and Gentile one;

who changed the Jewish idea of a distant, holy judging God to one who is personal, intimate, near, and merciful;

whose favor is not gained by law-keeping, but from whom we receive grace and forgiveness;

whose name is not too holy to mention, but who instead is called “Father.”

While in Israel three summers ago with a group of Jewish and non-Jewish Christians, I had a mental image of my life. It consisted of two chains—one was my pre-believing life and the other was my new life. Somehow in that land I got a glimpse of it all fitting together and not being two separate identities. And now my life is one long chain, stronger than the two pieces. God, in his mercy, holds my life together. Now it is a life lived

B'Shem Yeshua HaMashiah
(In the name of Jesus the Messiah). †

*Succoth is the Feast of Tabernacles (Lev. 23:34). My family always built a succoth in our yard and the Jewish community celebrated this feast in it.

LOOKING OUT

QUEBEC PROTESTANTISM INCREASES--French Protestantism, almost unknown in the strongly Roman Catholic Canadian province of Quebec, is suddenly registering a sharp increase in members. Thousands of French-speaking Canadian Protestants are reported to be worshiping in makeshift quarters, private homes, and some church buildings--the first such significant growth in 300 years. Analysts link the activity to the recent period of Quebec's self-assertion within the Canadian confederation of provinces.

BLACK JEWS APPEAL TO WHITES--A black Jewish sect in Ethiopia, thought to have existed since the fifth century A.D., has appealed to white Jews to recognize what it calls persecution by the Ethiopian government. Relatives of members of the sect, known as the Falashas, have accused world Jewry of ignoring their plight, saying that some 25,000 members have been killed or enslaved, and that 7,000 others have fled their villages for safety. The Israeli government has now formally recognized the Falashas as Jews, thus clearing the way for their immigration to Israel and automatic citizenship.

WOMEN'S STRIKE CALLED--If a strike call in England works, thousands of women who work in both the Anglican and the Roman Catholic Churches will not work on April 30. The work stoppage, called by the Ecumenical Feminist Trust, protests a recent vote by the General Synod of the Church of England barring women from becoming priests. The strike will be preceded by a boycott of Sunday worship services; women will be encouraged to worship with their families in house groups or at the "free churches" where women can preside.

THE ELECTRONIC CHURCH--Sponsors of TV religious programs have responded to widespread criticism that they funnel contributions away from established churches and Christian social concerns. A study commissioned by the Christian Broadcasting Network revealed that contributors to the popular "700 Club" give \$4 to other religious organizations for every dollar they give to the Club. CBN received \$58 million last year, and plans to open a \$10 million headquarters building at Virginia Beach, Virginia, this summer.....Evangelist James Robison has elected to invest in \$15 million worth of prime time TV in 1979, instead of buying a college campus at Big Sandy, Texas, as previously planned.

STANDING IN THE NEED OF PRAYER--A labor-management prayer breakfast, the first of its kind, was attended by 1,300 people in Pittsburgh recently. Co-chairmen were George Stinson, chairman of the National Steel Corp., and Lloyd McBride, president of the 1.4 million-member United Steelworkers of America, the largest union in the nation. Also attending was U.S. Secretary of Labor Ray Marshall.

"With all my heart I have longed to eat this Passover with you before the time comes for me to suffer. Believe me, I shall not eat the Passover again until all that it means is fulfilled in the Kingdom of God." (Luke 22:15-16, Phillips)

Communion Meditation

Why did Jesus long with all his heart to eat the Passover one last time with his disciples before his suffering? It must have had something to do with both his need of their companionship and their need to understand the significance of what he was about to go through (though they didn't fully see it until later).

But beyond that, it was Christ's last observance of a ritual which his own death was to supersede; he himself was about to become the eternal and consummate Paschal Lamb. Here he was to eliminate the need for any further sacrifice to be made for the sins of mankind, and accomplish a deliverance far greater than that of the children of Israel from the Egyptians. Being fully aware of how much of God's work with Israel was about to be left behind, Jesus was reverent in the memory of the special favors that had been shown to the race from which he drew his earthly lineage. His sharing the Passover with his Jewish disciples was a reaffirmation that God was determined to begin with Israel in his liberation of all mankind.

But Jesus mentions another, final observance of the Passover, which will come after "all that it means is fulfilled in the Kingdom of God." Interpretations may differ as to whether he meant the Lord's Supper in the church or some final feast around God's throne at the end of time. The point remains in either case that it was his last time to observe it as a human being with other human beings, and he valued the way it drew them together as common recipients of God's saving power. After this, he would have to surge ahead of his brethren and be the pioneer of a deliverance so great that they could not comprehend it.

Jesus knew the value, the warm reinforcement of affirming together what God has done for us, and he was eager to participate in it one last time with those who were closest to him on earth. Surely his attitude in the upper room is instructive for us, who celebrate in bitter-sweet communion a feast greater than the Passover, and a blood-redemption that establishes a kinship beyond the physical. Jesus calls us around his table that we may sup together in thankful joy, celebrating our common heritage from the Father. To understand that privilege fully is to long for it with all our hearts.

—Elton D. Higgs

Living with Uncertainty

By CLINE DAVIS

One of my biases is that we dare not pick and choose the parts of the biblical text which we like, and discard the rest. To do so causes us to miss many diamonds in the rough—we have been so put off by the rough exterior of some texts that we have been unwilling to dig for the gem inside.

Some time ago my particular bias was put to the test when it was brought to my attention that there are very few sermons on Psalm 137. While I was studying this psalm, and finding it fascinating, the story of the tragedy in Jonestown, Guyana, broke. It occurred to me that there are some striking parallels between the two events. Both say something very significant about uncertainty, and living with it. I believe that by looking at each one, we can draw some valid comparisons.

We don't hear many sermons on the 137th psalm for a very good reason. This psalm lacks many of those elements which have made us treasure the other psalms. There are no words of

God's gracious gifts and sustaining power. This psalm speaks instead of anger, frustration, doubt, and an incredibly violent desire for revenge. We are appalled at the intensity of hatred in the last verse: "Happy shall he be who takes your little ones and dashes them against the rock." It is no wonder that our immediate reaction is to turn from this psalm and read instead, "The Lord is my Shepherd, I shall not want."

In this psalm, we hear many strange things, including a call for ultimate revenge. This is the kind of thought that might flash white-hot across our own minds when we feel extremely wronged and are violently angry. This kind of thought frightens us, and we bury it immediately. We don't want anyone—especially God—to know that we are capable of such thoughts. But our psalmist doesn't play such games with God. He doesn't repress his true feelings, but lays them before God, and makes no excuses for them. I sense a relationship with God which is not based on a person's ability to hide true feelings and to hoodwink God.

It is therefore refreshing and somewhat relieving for me to read this psalm. Its honesty says to me: "Go ahead and be genuine. Drop the false front, at least with God." It tells me that I can

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be real and honest in my relationship with God. Any other stance before him damages our relationship. The psalmist also illuminates my own leanings toward violent solutions to problems and my own longings for revenge, which often arise without any good reason.

But our anguished composer does have very good reasons for his violent thoughts. Possibly he himself had lived in Jerusalem, and had experienced the siege of the Babylonians for two devastating years. There was no food in the city, and an unbelievable degree of starvation set in. During another such siege on Samaria some years before this, people ate the bodies of the dead, and even killed to eat (2 Kings 6). And along with the starvation, the Babylonians breached the walls, and many more were killed. Those who

my hand wither." The Hebrew word translated "if," when used with the imperfect tense, as in this sentence, indicates that the action is an open possibility (*Gesenius' Hebrew Grammar*, para. 159, m). By using this construction the writer recognized that he might, indeed, forget Jerusalem in the future. He holds desperately to his faith, but the uncertainty and doubt are there. In the future he might even forget the God of Israel.

On this note of an uncertain future, let us leave the psalmist and turn to the recent tragedy involving the People's Temple, where there was no uncertainty—at least at first.

One distinguishing mark of cults such as the People's Temple is the *lack* of uncertainty. Most claim to have definite answers to all questions

**All the things to which this Hebrew had tied
his religious beliefs were gone: the temple, the king,
and the priests. None of the old, pat answers seemed to work
anymore. The old doctrines must be reassessed.**

weren't killed were carried into captivity near Babylon, as our psalmist, to be used and tormented by their captors (see vs. 3 of this psalm).

If I had seen part of my family starve to death, or killed by an opposing army, I don't doubt that I would be bitter and long for revenge. But oddly enough, the psalmist's hatred isn't because of the loss of his family. It is because the city of David had been destroyed. The seat of the kingdom and the home of the temple of God were gone. What would happen now? Had not God promised that there would always be a king in the line of David on the throne? Did this mean that God had broken his promise? The temple, God's own house, had been destroyed, and how could one worship God without a temple? Further, did this mean that God had abandoned Israel? Or, worse still, was God too weak to defend his own temple against the onslaught of Marduk, god of Babylon?

Suddenly, all the things to which this Hebrew had tied his religious beliefs were gone: the temple, the king, and the priests. None of the old, pat answers seemed to work anymore. The old doctrines formulated through the years must be reassessed. Even the man's faith was in question, and worship was impossible. "How shall we sing the Lord's song in a foreign land?" The author takes an oath, but even the oath expresses his uncertainty. "If I forget you, O Jerusalem, let

about God and life. Of course, each of the over 3,000 cults in the United States has a different set of answers.) The cults are growing rapidly because many people are looking for just this kind of certainty. (Incidentally, this is one reason why the more conservative churches are growing rapidly; they don't raise questions—they give definite answers to all questions.) One ex-member of the Temple has described Jim Jones as having an answer for every question and an explanation for every answer. This certainty was a relief for many people. They didn't have to worry about the complex questions about God and life. Jim Jones had the answer. People flocked in by the thousands. They gave their property, intellect, and souls to Jones and, in turn, he gave them certainty. Because he had all the answers, he knew that he could build himself a utopia, and people believed him.

The people moved to Jonestown, Guyana, where no questions were allowed. If everyone listened to Jones, the colony would be perfect. People listened, but utopia did not appear. Problems developed. People were unhappy. A United States Congressman and some investigative reporters came to Jonestown, and the dissatisfaction of many people began to surface. They began to realize that Jones had been wrong. The sense of security in Jonestown began to erode; but cults cannot exist on uncertainty. The peo-

ple faced a crisis. Their ground of certainty was gone; their leader had been wrong.

In both cases, in Psalm 137 and in the Jonestown incident, there was a crisis. The psalmist and the residents of Jonestown had been thrown from the world of unreal, false security into the stark reality of an uncertain existence. How would they react? Both the residents of Jonestown and the psalmist expressed anger, but what happened after the expression of that anger made all the difference.

The people of Jonestown lashed out at Congressman Ryan and the newspeople. Here were the persons responsible for shattering their false world. They then took vengeance on the whole world, which was filled with uncertainty. They embarked on a short path of murder and suicide.

We don't know the psalmist's reaction, but we do know how the people of Israel reacted. After expressing their anger toward Babylon, they set about to rebuild their concepts of God and the world. They reformulated their thoughts about how God was working in their nation and in the world. During this period in history, Israel had her greatest surge of theological activity. The second half of Isaiah was written, and we have the concept of Israel as the suffering servant. Israel's outlook about her role in God's work

to speak to his relatives about God and the realities of life (Luke 16). While I have not actually wished for a person to return from the dead, I have at times wanted something as certain to prove my beliefs beyond a shadow of a doubt. For myself, though, and for many others, uncertainty remains a reality. We have felt the flashes of uncertainty even about the existence of God. We have periods when the problem of evil in the world raises difficulties for us. (If God is all good and at the same time all powerful, why is there evil in the world?) Things happen to us which cause us to question: Could we have been wrong in our estimate of the Christian God, and of his messenger, Jesus?

For those of us who feel those stabbing, uncomfortable doubts, or those sometimes endless periods of uncertainty, there is the problem of how to handle our uncertainty. I suggest that there are at least three ways to deal with it.

First, it is possible to bury the uncertainty and pretend it doesn't exist. People do this in various ways. Some go into the charismatic movement in order to be able to produce tangible evidence (tongues, etc.) to refute their feelings and questions. Others find fellowships which put up a front of "spirituality" or enthusiasm where doubts are taboo, and not admitted. Still others

**Both Israel and the People's Temple had to react
to the uncertainty of life. Israel's reaction ensured
her continued existence. Jonestown will be remembered as
a tragic reminder of one devastating effect of the cult mentality.**

broadened greatly; they were to be a light to the nations. The writings of Jeremiah and Ezekiel and other prophets began to be pulled together into individual "books." This is the greatest single period of creativity in Israel's long and twisting history.

Both Israel and the People's Temple had to react to the uncertainty of life. Ancient Israel's reaction ensured her continued existence, and she is remembered even by non-Jews and non-Christians as a heroically struggling nation. Jonestown will be remembered as a tragic reminder of one devastating effect of the cult mentality.

It would be easy for us to sit back from our vantage point and condemn the cultists. Before we do this, we should examine ourselves closely. Have we never wished for certainty about what we believe? I, for one, can sympathize with the rich man who wanted Abraham to send Lazarus

join cults or legalistically-oriented churches, because they have the answers to every question. Just ask the leader or the minister and he will give you a pat answer to put your mind at ease. You don't have to put up with a minister who responds by saying, "Here are several possibilities—you make up your own mind." This burying of uncertainty works until some hole develops in the armor of certain answers, as in Jonestown. Then, one is right back at the starting point: What do I do with uncertainty?

A second approach is just to give up. Many did this after the fall of Jerusalem. The problems of reformulating their ideas about God overwhelmed them. They could not take the sudden uncertainty and the new questions which arose, so they dropped out of the worship of the God of Israel. Today, many people are appalled at the uncertainties involved with faith, and they also

drop out. The church is full of persons who are able to see the questions, and ask them at every opportunity, such as in classes and in some of the periodicals. But many of these people are either unwilling or unable to formulate suggestions for alternative approaches. I am convinced that many of these persons are already victims of the "drop out" syndrome, and are speaking out of their own cynicism.

The third option is that we can realize that we walk by faith and not by sight. Neither the biblical text nor any other evidence offers proof-positive about God and this life. As long as there is faith, there is an element of uncertainty. (Whatever made us think that uncertainty was wrong? It is natural.)

Perhaps we have forgotten the story of one of Jesus' healings. Jesus asked the father in effect: "Do you believe?" The father cried out: "I believe; help my unbelief!" (Mark 9:14-29). This is

a cry of true faith; and those of us who have felt this same uncertainty can echo this cry. We can lay our uncertainties beside our faith, and hold them both up as an offering to God.

Perhaps, too, uncertainty is one of our real assets. Not only can it push us to probe and ask questions; it can move us toward an understanding of grace. Our relationship with God doesn't depend on our great feeling of certainty, or on our having all the right answers. We do not hold the relationship together—God does, because he is a God of love and grace. Realizing our uncertainty can cause us to realize our dependence on God. Then we can echo the words of Paul: "When I am weak, then I am strong." With an awareness of our uncertainty and our dependence on God, we can have the freedom to reach out and probe for new answers, realizing that our answers will always be somewhat tentative, tinged with uncertainty. †

once there was a wasp
trapped
in a window screen
wanting
to be free
but the elder
of the house
feared
the sting
he saw a wasp
free
running loose
in a house of children
and
the sleepless nights
waiting
fearing him
lighting
on the body
AND THEN
the sting
the pain
the scar

thus the elder said:
it's isolation
at all cost
Never
let him near
the children
remember the sting
remember the sting
remember
the sting
don't open the window
and chance
the pain.
and thus
a wasp died
and fell
unto dust
and the elder sighed
and said:
it is better
for one to suffer
than
a house of children.

Sinner Wasp

(John 11:49-53, TEV)

— Claude Whitcomb

One Question Remains . . .

A-NNUSING

By G. JAMES ROBINSON

It happened one day without warning, like a fuse burning out and darkness instantly engulfing a room. Words that at one time carried tremendous emotional impact suddenly became hollow, impotent, innocuous sounds. Words like sin, soul, and salvation became meaningless. Redemption, atonement, love, faith—the very foundations of my religious heritage became clanging bells and tinkling cymbals.

How it happened remains a mystery. At first I thought it was simply a circuit overload; that I'd exposed my soul to one too many youth retreats, that I had seminared myself to spiritual death, that I had hollowly voiced blue skies and rainbows one too many times. But, on second thought, after a brief respite from the piety of seminars and retreats, I realized it was not that simple. Detaching emotionally from the "spiritual" framework didn't help much. For, when once again I threw myself into my religious work, there was no change in my feelings. Only deadness.

The bottom came in Gatlinburg, Tennessee, during a lonely weekend when I sat for hours in an old rocking chair on the front porch of a rented cabin. My mother had just died after her third battle with cancer, in spite of feverish prayers. My father died of loneliness three months later, and I'd just quit my job because of my heretical beliefs, causing such anguish

in the flock (mainly my insistence that Baptists like my parents were going to heaven, too).

That night in pitch blackness, listening to a babbling brook, and wiping a torrent of continual tears, I carefully disassembled my belief framework, examined it like a kid with an erector set, and eliminated, one by one, the defective trusses of my mind. At 10:30 p.m. I packed away patternism; at 10:43 I saw that Bibliolotry was defective; at 11:16 I dismantled a shaky hope in healing; at 12:38 a.m. I gave up on institutional religion in any form; at 1:31 a.m. I gave up on divine intervention; at 2:04 a.m. I realized we can't be sure about very much of anything and became a hopeful agnostic. The entire framework was leveled. I placed the pieces in a mental box marked "Void and Irrelevant."

Raw atheism presented itself in the form of a bright full moon, with junk on it, a cold, mechanical universe.

I felt no urge to commit suicide, felt no despair, but only relief that it had been decided.

One more question remained. Standing outside the sealed box of rusty, useless pieces stood The Man. No matter how I looked at Him, or if I shut my eyes or opened my eyes, He stood there smiling.

And so we opened the box again and looked inside together, and I said, "Hey, just for you, I'll try it again."

†

Churches and Sects:

How King James Led Us Astray

By BUFF SCOTT, JR.

A neighbor lady and I were in my front yard discussing eternal salvation and the role that churches play. She and her husband are members of a partisan group whose terms of admission are so stringent that no one in our community is considered saved unless he is identified with their party. She almost went into shock when I told her that it was not necessary to be a member of any church to reach God's gloryland, since in my view churches are the same as *religious parties*. She cut our conversation short and took off across the street shaking her head in disbelief. I wanted so badly to tell her that she could be born anew, practice Christian principles, and adhere to scriptural guidelines without ever becoming a religious partisan, just as one may practice political principles and adhere to political guidelines without ever becoming a political partisan.

I am a politician in that there are certain political principles I believe in and have accepted. But I am not a political party member for I have

not joined or placed my membership with any of them. Politically I am a free man. Not one political party upon the face of this earth can tell me how to manage my political life. I am not bound by them or fettered by them. I will go among all political parties, when invited, and share my political views, but I shall remain free of their political dictates.

Similarly, I am a religionist in that there are certain religious principles I believe in and have embraced. But I am not a religious party member for I have surrendered my membership in all of them. Religiously I am a free man. Therefore no religious party upon the face of this earth has the least bit of control over my religious life. I am not bound to them or fettered by them. I will go among all of them, when invited, and share my religious views, but I shall remain free of their party dictates. And this brings me to the crux of my subject matter.

Churches and religious parties are compatible, and, as I said, can be properly and correctly equated. When I was born anew my name was immediately enrolled in heaven and I became part of God's universal community. No other formal acts were necessary. But since a partisan pulpit preacher immersed me, I was expected

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to join the local partisan group or church by placing my membership—either formally or informally.

My acceptance of and obedience to Jesus made me a Christian. My submission to the local church's terms of admission made me a party man, therefore a partisan Christian. This was even more so as I began to preach my party's terms of staying admitted, the most common one being that I must never accept the "denominational idea" that instrumental music "in worship" is scriptural. I joined God's congregation of redeemed sinners when I placed my trust in his Son and submitted to being immersed in water (Acts 2:38). When I then joined a church I became a partisan. But when I surrendered my church membership, I retained my heavenly membership. I was no less God's child when I determined never again to yield my Christian lifestyle to the party machinery of a church. My love for the brethren did not lessen; only my love for the party system. We have only to read Paul's "works of the flesh" in Galatians 5:19-21 to conclude that the party, factional system is condemned.

If, as I believe, churches can be equated with religious parties, we must accept the fact that

**If, as I believe, churches can be equated
with religious parties, we must accept the fact
that Jesus did not set in motion any church.**

Jesus and his special envoys did not set in motion *any* church. The common versions' usage of "church" do not offer any help, for the word does not really translate the Greek *ecclesia*. A non-scholarly man like myself need not attain a degree in Greek to conclude that Moses did not have a "church in the wilderness," nor did one exist under David, as is depicted in the King James Version of the Scriptures (Acts 7:38; Heb. 2:12). *Ecclesia* is better translated "congregation"; but King James decreed that his learned translators not do so. He issued fourteen instructions that were to be adhered to. No. 3 reads: "*The old ecclesiastical words to be kept; as the word church, not to be translated congregation, &c.*"* In 1955 "The Authentic New Testament" was published by Hugh J. Schonfield, the only Jew ever to translate the New Covenant documents from the Greek language. He was not a theologian. Perhaps this explains why his translation is non-ecclesiastical. He changed "church"

to *community* and "baptize" to *immerse*. Alexander Campbell's "Living Oracles" translation used *congregation* in the place of church.

It appears that King James became the author of a deliberate sectarian mistake when he refused his translators permission to translate the Greek *ecclesia* community, congregation, or assembly. Contemporary religions have pounced upon this offense by creating and establishing sects and factions under the guise of "church" until they have divided and sub-divided themselves out of practical and impressive existence. Every church since then has claimed to have a monopoly on truth and human souls to the exclusion of all other claimants. Within our own Restoration brotherhood there are at least twenty factions or sects, each claiming to be the "church" ushered in by Jesus' apostles. *Each church's terms of admission and terms of staying admitted are different from the other churches' and to a great extent foreign to the terms introduced by Jesus and his ambassadors.* To me this is the major factor which makes a community of saints a religious party.

Even "congregation" and "community" are not immune from ecclesiastical abuse. And if the word "church" did not exist, people would

devise another term to use as their sacred cow. So the usage of a term alone does not make a group of believers a religious party. *It is when the terms of admission and the terms of staying admitted are either partly or fully foreign to the terms inaugurated by the King of kings that a group of believers becomes a religious party.* I believe this definition will stand the test of scriptural exegesis.

A college president said to me in a letter recently that "church" is a proper translation if it means to us what *ecclesia* meant to the Greeks. This approach is appealing, but it won't work if we really care to recover the vocabulary of the divine Spirit. Would it be proper to employ the words "sect" or "faction" if they convey to us what *ecclesia* conveyed to the Greeks? We could quote Romans 16:16 thus: "*The factions of Christ greet you.*"

I like to think in terms of Jesus reigning over
(Continued on p. 17)

The Restoration of Secularity

By ROBERT O. FIFE

Facing the expansion of a new paganism, sometimes fiery, at other times glacial, disciples of Jesus are endangered by two extremes. The one extreme is that ancient temptation to "Make a reconciliation with time," and conform to the spirit of the age. The other is to adopt a new monasticism, whose walls are institutional exclusivism, and intellectual hermitism.

Neither of these choices fulfills the mandates laid upon the Christian community. The first transgresses that urgent command, "Come out from them, and be separate" (2 Cor. 6:17). The second is deaf to the Lord's petition to the Father, "I do not pray that thou shouldst take them out of the world, but that thou shouldst keep them from the evil one" (Jn. 17:15). Neither does it hear his direct command: "As the Father has sent me, even so I send you" (Jn. 20:21).

There is a more adequate way to respond to the challenge of this age. That way is through the *restoration of secularity*.

But let it first be made emphatically clear that we are not advocating the recovery of *secularism*! *Secularism* and *secularity*, in this view, are two very different attitudes and lifestyles. This difference we should explore.

Of what do we speak, when we use the word, "secular"? By "secular" or "secularity," we do

not mean that which is evil or unholy, and thereby opposed to the "sacred." The difference between the sacred and the secular is not that one is good and the other evil. Rather, the two are faces of the same coin. The sacred points to the transcendent—the Eternal One—while the secular points to the temporal—the *saeculum*, or world of time in which we live.

The sacred and the secular are not contradictory, but complementary, for the simple reason that in this life the sacred can only be expressed in time, while the secular has no meaning apart from the transcendent.

But what may be surprising to many sincere Christians is that secularity, so understood, is rooted in the Bible. Let us explore this.

I. THE NATURE OF BIBLICAL SECULARITY

Created Secularity

By act of creation, the living God became the source of secularity. In the moment that magnificent fiat was uttered, "Let there be light!" the world of time began. As order, which is "heaven's first law" (Pope), was imposed, so came the seasons and the years. The principle of life was given various forms until climaxed in man—the one creature upon whom God stamped his own image.

To this creature, God entrusted the world of time which he had created. "Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth and subdue it. . . have

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dominion. . .," were the words of the mandate (Gen. 1:28). It is worthy of note that *God gave man* dominion. Man does not have it of himself. Our dominion is always to be fulfilled under God's authority and judgment. In this consists our secularity.

The Secular Christ

The incarnation exhibits another dimension of biblical secularity. "Christ was born in the *flesh*" is that great affirmation of the gospel so offensive to the Gnostics. Growing up in Nazareth, Jesus learned the trade of a carpenter, from youthful apprentice to master craftsman. So, with his own hands, he exercised dominion over the tree, which God had given mankind in the beginning.

It is significant that such activities of ordinary life represented growth "in favor with God and man." The Father was, indeed, pleased when the Son submitted himself in the sacred act of baptism. Not so often noted is the pleasure of God toward Jesus' faithfulness to the mundane affairs of Nazareth.

As Jesus began his public ministry, some took offense because he was "Joseph's son" (Lk. 4:22). In their view, he lacked the credentials expected of a religious leader—especially when he judged their prejudices. Jesus stood outside the Nazarene establishment.

In similar vein, the religious leaders almost without exception resented his deeds and words. These constituted a judgment upon them from

centuries in the Temple Holy Place, his offering was made without liturgy, on the same hill of execution used for ordinary criminals.

Thus, the cross is an event in time, having significance for eternity. In it, the sacred and the secular are forever joined.

Sent into the Secular

When Jesus sent the disciples into the nations, he only reinforced what he had previously said: "As the Father sent me, even so send I you." He had not prayed that we be taken out of the age, but rather that we be kept from the evil one. And it is well that he so prayed, for upon entering the age, we became vulnerable to its spirit and power.

So they went to claim the world for the King, announcing his reign. As ambassadors they proclaimed the word of reconciliation, calling upon all to repent. "Jesus is Lord!" they declared. And they labored expectantly, looking for the day when "every knee shall bow" before him (Phil. 2:10-11).

In Jesus' name they judged men and institutions. They lived in the world of time with a transformed demeanor. Daily, in a multitude of circumstances, they declared Jesus to be Lord of all.

Converts were likewise taught to live in the *saeculum*. They were exhorted to "redeem the time," because the days were evil (Eph. 5:16, KJV). Lives were to be presented as vibrant sacrifices, not conformed to the age, but living in

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one totally unqualified. "By what authority do you do this?" was a question often asked. When did God ever judge the "sacred" by the "secular"—as when he cleansed the Temple? (Mt. 21:12-23)

Most significant for our theme is the cross—that "hinge of history," as Carl Michelson has called it. Certainly, the process of redemption need not have centered upon an event in the *saeculum*, but it did. Under edict of Pontius Pilate, Jesus was crucified "outside the gate," with a superscription written in three languages. Although his sacrifice fulfilled those offered for

it, nonetheless (Rom. 12:1-2). Duties within the *saeculum* were enjoined. As slaves, disciples were to "adorn the gospel" by their manner of service (Titus 2:10); as citizens they were to bring honor to Christ by their civil conduct (Rom. 13:7-14). Shining as "lights in the world" (Phil. 2:15), disciples were to embody the gospel. They were exhorted to be living letters "known and read by all men" (2 Cor. 3:2).

Thus the paradox of "holy worldliness" was commended. Called to "come out from them," and to "be separate," disciples were at the same

time reminded of their secular role. After all, it was "in the world" that their mission was to be fulfilled.

Here was no withdrawal into a hermetically sealed realm called "the sacred." Rather, theirs was an invasion of the *saeculum* in the Name of that most worthy and powerful Lord. They had, indeed, "come out" from the age—from its value systems, and lifestyle. "Such *were* some of you," said Paul to the Corinthians (1 Cor. 6:11). But they "came out" only to receive the divine mandate, "Go!" They were to be ambassadors, proclaiming the rightful reign of God over all persons.

**All authority is of God, who requires of magistrates
that they be his ministers "for good." The effect of this
mandate is to challenge any system, political or economic, which
makes absolute claim upon human loyalty.**

The imagery of the pilgrim is also instructive for our theme. A pilgrim is one who is "on the way." His goal is beyond the age in which he journeys. His destiny is not contained in the status quo, nor is his hope limited by it. Yet, he lives in it.

The pilgrim's ultimate loyalty is to the One who calls him. Were this not so, he would never have left the City of Man. Daily, he must reaffirm his commitment, for it is written of the ancient pilgrims that had they desired to return, they could have done so. The pilgrim views the *saeculum* differently from the dweller along the way. The dweller is committed to things as they are. His life and destiny are contained in them. No transcendent goal—no glowing vision of the Heavenly City for him! His is that worldliness we shall recognize as secularism.

But the pilgrim represents that secularity commended in Scripture. He lives in the land, but he lives in "tents." He enjoys the sequence of days and seasons, the fruit of the field in all its beauty, but keeps the flexibility and freedom to follow the leading of the strong Pioneer of his faith. (Heb. 11).

Judgment over the Secular

Scripture consistently affirms that the *saeculum* is under the judgment of God. With one voice the prophets reminded both the kings of Israel and alien powers that their majesties were not absolute. All authority is of God, who there-

fore requires of magistrates that they be his ministers "for good" (Rom. 13:4).

The effect of this mandate is to challenge any system, political or economic, which makes absolute claim upon human loyalty. At the same time, other areas of human achievement—the arts, the sciences, the marvels of technology—are all responsible to God. The pilgrim is responsible to proclaim God's sovereignty. Thus does biblical faith contribute to the process of secularization.

The simple refusal of early disciples to bow before the image of the Roman emperor is a case

in point. Claiming to be "Divus," Caesar had issued a decree that every citizen make a votive offering unto him as unto a god. Such an act was also considered an oath of loyalty to the empire. The early Christians did not deny that Caesar was Caesar, but that Caesar was God. In refusing to worship his image they contributed to secularization by refusing to allow Caesar's authority to be absolutized. Even Caesar was under God.

The relation of the gospel to secularization in our time has been especially noteworthy on the foreign mission field. There, social systems absolutized by religious sanctions have continued to the present generation. Deeply-rooted traditions resist change, as in Hindu India, because the status quo is sanctioned by religion. Consequently, any change in the social order is considered by many to be an irreligious act.

A. T. van Leeuwen calls such societies, "ontocratic." They are coherent socio-political-cultural systems absolutized by religion. As such they were commonly beyond criticism, until the gospel came.

In his *Christianity in World History*, van Leeuwen notes the secularizing impact which the gospel has had upon such ancient ontocracies. The gospel declared that they, too, are under judgment of the Living God. Not even the most ancient and venerable of them can longer lay absolute claim upon the allegiance of human beings. In consequence, revolutionary forces have been unleashed, and vast changes have taken place in cultures which went unchallenged for centuries.

Lesslie Newbigin has also taken note of this process in his *Honest Religion for Secular Man*. Newbigin clearly shows the liberating power which the gospel has exercised in the modern age. Speaking of "the faith that it is possible to create a new order of existence," Newbigin asks, Whence this faith? He answers:

It cannot be denied that the main thrust of the teaching of the ancient Asian religions has been away from a concern to change the world. Their dominant teaching has been that the wise man is he who seeks to be content with the world, to be released from attachment to it, but not to seek to change it. The idea of total welfare for all men as a goal to be pursued within history is . . . a secularized form of the biblical idea of the kingdom of God. It is rooted in that understanding of human history as the sphere of God's redeeming acts which sets the Bible apart from all the other sacred literature of mankind.

The Bible's impact upon secularization is not only to be seen in the fact that it brings all human systems under divine judgment. The Bible itself is a "secular" book. This is not a new idea. Over a hundred years ago, some British ministers said of the Scripture:

It comes to rule this life, not to regulate the next—it lays down no hereafter duties. All the duties of Christianity are now on earth—deeds done in the body, or, if you will so call them,

secular duties. (*Christianity and Secularism*, London, 1863, p. 34; quoted in R. Gregor Smith, *Secular Christianity*, London, 1966, p. 147).

But it is to be noted that the gospel may not be the only power capable of shattering ontocracies. Modern Japan may well represent such a culture, changed not by the liberating power of the gospel, but by the onslaught of secularism, itself.

Few in the West can imagine the revolutionary nature of the Emperor's declaration following Japan's defeat, that he was not longer to be considered divine. This cleared the way for Japan to become a western-style "secular" state. But the secular state as represented in the United States came into being as a corollary to the free-church tradition. No such corollary existed in Japan. Thus, Japan suffered the enormous tragedy of moving overnight from an ontocracy whose culture and values were infused by religion, to a "modern" presumably "secular" state. But apart from that biblical faith which would place Japanese institutions under judgment of God, Japan has become terribly vulnerable to secularism, especially in the form of materialism.

But if *secularity* is biblical, and *secularism* is dangerous, what is meant by secularism? Part II will deal with that question, and the restoration of secularity. †



(Continued from p. 13)

his community and man reigning over the churches. Jesus has all authority in his new congregation and man exercises authority in the churches. Anyone who gives himself to a religious party has surrendered part of his will to a human master. He is no longer free to serve Jesus wholly and completely. He either gives his allegiance to the party or forfeits his membership, thus demonstrating that he was a member of something in addition to God's universal family.

Lest I leave the wrong impression and be accused of advocating further division, permit me to say that I do not believe our divided condition would be remedied by our pulling out of our parties and starting a "Non-Partisan Congregation." I am confident there are many non-

partisans in partisan groups whose love for the brethren compels them to remain where they are and work for the good of all. They should stay put, if "pastors" and "elderships" will let them, encouraging others to cast aside partisan shackles by becoming independent thinkers and making Jesus only their source of authority.

My family and I attend the meetings of a partisan group. I conduct a class. They recognize me as a free Christian without party attachments. They know I will never "place my membership," for then I would be putting myself under the control of a human master. Jesus is the only master I will ever need. †

*Lewis' *History of the English Translations of the Bible*, in Alexander Campbell's *Christian Baptist*, Volume II, Number 4, November 1, 1824.

When God Stooped

By ROBERT J. ROE

The occasion is the washing of the disciples' feet by Christ, the Lord. We see God incarnate stooping down to man. I find it almost as easy to witness Calvary, knowing he was dying for me, as to have God stoop to the position of a slave and clean my feet. But only in washing the feet of men under those mundane circumstances could God show us just how far he would go to teach his lesson on love and humility.

As arm-chair theologians we often spew thoughtless phrases regarding how we will deal with final judgment. Some have already worn out their rebuttals, rehearsing how they will argue with the Judge. But what if, as we face God, we look up and see the expression of deepest agony? It would stagger and stupefy us to hear God cry, as he witnesses the loss of even one soul. To look at the face of the Eternal One and see tears of despair at losing us would be enough judgment for all mankind. That would be hell!

But who could argue with such judgment? To hear the agony of God for me would strike me silent. To lose eternal life because I refused him would not be unreasonable, but only punishment I deserved. But to know God wept over his own failure with this creature is almost unthinkable. Gehenna, the garbage dump of Jerusalem, could hold no more despair for me than knowing I had willfully spurned the greatest love affair man could ever imagine. I would know that heaven had been "stacked" in my favor, because the most powerful motive is not held by Satan but by God. The Almighty Creator of the Universe bowed and wiped the dirt and manure from between the toes of man. By doing

so he established the greatest example of love, short of Calvary, we will ever know—God stooped.

Love must be the one divine trait man cannot successfully mimic. It must be lived. And God has done everything possible to show us just how important it is. Often we act "out of character." Were I aware of a little of what Christ knew, I would have been so tempted into self-centeredness that I would care little about where I was or who I was with. Yet using the towel and the basin and in the face of Calvary, Christ remained in character. Unlike me, he was consistent. He didn't forget his call. He moved ahead by stooping down. John records what went through his mind at this hour (John 13: 1,3). Remembering his place with God; aware that his nature is one with God; knowing that soon he must face the cross for us all; and realizing the disciples then and now needed an example of loving service—he dressed as a slave and waited on man, an example for his church forever.

In this action Christ tells his church that the world will not be won by mere words. The unbeliever has always thought himself able to sink the Christian into silence by argument. But who can argue against the Christian witness to the love of God? There are two edges to our sword—words and deeds. Men can ignore the Christian message in many ways but none can reply against Christians who love them and serve them.

Who taught us this? God. How do we learn what love is? Remember what he has done for you. Remember when God stooped. †

Divorce and Remarriage: Continuing Questions

This month we invite readers to respond to questions raised by subscriber *John Zimmerman* and the editor, regarding divorce and remarriage. Zimmerman finds four main positions on this among the churches with which he is familiar: (1) All remarriages are suspect, since no party is faultless in a divorce. (2) Unless the divorce was caused by adultery, the second marriage is void and the person so situated is living in adultery and must return to the previous marital state. (3) The question is ignored by the church leadership, and the matter is left between the persons and God (a position, Zimmerman notes, which fails to give any relief to the persons involved. (4) While remarriage after divorce for causes other than adultery is unscriptural, the sub-

sequent marriage should not be terminated when children are involved ("a situation ethics solution," reader Zimmerman notes, "usually conceded by most of the laity").

Such a state of affairs poses several questions. Among them are (1) Is there a way for the church to boldly and explicitly accept non-adulterous divorcees who have remarried, on the grounds of grace (as it would for a murderer or other sinner), while still teaching that God's ideal is one spouse per lifetime? (2) Suppose a church wishes to conform strictly to the position that no person divorced for reasons other than adultery, may remarry and be received into fellowship. Is there a way for them to review marriage cases without being judgmental and legalistic about who

was "at fault" in the divorce? (For example, who is at fault when a woman divorces a non-practicing, homosexual husband?) (3) Is repentance and forgiveness for a divorce annulled by remarriage, or is it parallel to that which one might receive in the case of any other sin? (4) What about the practice of some churches who refuse to "withdraw" from a person who, in the elders' judgment, is unscripturally remarried, but who also refuse to fully use that person in its worship, teaching, and leadership?

Please select one or more of these questions and comment on them below, clipping or copying the form and sending it to

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The Severity and the Grace

BOOKS

By Bobbie Lee Holley

A Severe Mercy, by Sheldon Vanauken (New York: Harper & Row, 1977), 233 pp., \$6.95.

Reviewed by Kim Woodward, homemaker and member of the Chapel Hill, N. C. Church of Christ.

Death does not often initiate stories of love; but Sheldon Vanauken effectively draws us into his complete world—from his advantaged beginnings to the death of his wife, Davy.

The plot and essence of *A Severe Mercy* are summarized in the first chapter. Discovering his roots at the family estate, Glenmerle, the author traces the history of this place so far that one wonders whether the story has not been entirely revealed. Closely entwined with his love of Glenmerle is his love of Davy; the estate and the girl seem to evoke parallel memories of beauty, youth, joy, and sorrow.

From this prologue the story becomes a detailed sharing of the depths, decisions, and delights of "The Shining Barrier" which the Vanaukens erected against "creeping separateness," the self-centeredness which kills love. They sought utter, complete closeness and union. Their love was protected from indecency, discourtesy, and selfishness by the Barrier. From within its walls they adored the beauties of the world, ranging through literature, music, and friendships. Life was exciting as they continually decided how to preserve and nurture their glorious love for each other.

The Barrier grew stronger, less vul-

nerable; yet one worrisome breach was possible—death. Haunted by the thought of this separation, Vanauken and Davy agreed to die together, in love, whenever one or the other was injured, mortally ill or aged. Now The Barrier was invulnerable; they began planning and playing the future days together. (Vanauken uses his own poetry to emphasize this and other phases of their lives.)

Dreams of the *Grey Goose*, a yacht for the seas and world travel, materialized into full-range navigation courses and intense reading. However, World War II intervened; plans were delayed. Vanauken went to sea on a destroyer; Davy went to Glenmerle.

Following their longest separation, three months, Davy and Vanauken were able to meet briefly at sea in the Hawaiian islands. All was still perfect. Shortly after this reaffirmation, Vanauken remembered the shadows of masts on the two ships and likened the crossing of them to the sign of the Christian cross. His skeptical theology is elucidated at this point. Christianity, for him, was rubbish; no intelligent person could actually believe it. But, strangely, some did believe and profess. Someday, perhaps, Vanauken thought he should look further into the matter. In the meantime, he admittedly sought the pagan

life of dedication to love and beauty, with Davy at his side.

It was with Davy that Vanauken witnessed from the hills above Pearl Harbor the destruction of the Pacific Fleet. Throughout the misfortunes of the war, Davy and he were lucky to be together in Hawaii. They became proficient in ocean racing during free time. When the war ended, they returned to Florida; Vanauken was released from the Navy and their sailing days on *Gull* began. Glorious months were spent on this forerunner of *Grey Goose*. The war seemed far and long in the past.

In their plans for *Grey Goose* was included the provision for self support. More education was needed. Davy and Vanauken settled at Yale with the renewed joy of learning; but during this time Davy had an unusual emotional experience; she felt overwhelmed by her sinfulness. Neither she nor Vanauken recognized this as "the classical conviction of sin." The experience passed; they completed their Yale studies, moved to Virginia for a college teaching position, and ordered a schooner, *Grey Goose*, to be built. Sailing once again proffered escape and happiness for them. Then came the opportunity to go to Oxford—a dream for several years.

Surprisingly, their first friends were all Christians, deeply committed, highly intelligent. The stereotype of a dull, stuffy Christian was shattered. From these friendships, Davy and Vanauken began delving into the world of Christianity, defining believers, talking and singing with these unique persons. This became the pressing time to have another look at Christianity. Voluminous reading, including *Screwtape Letters*, the C.S.

Lewis classic and study with their patient friends led to new insights, especially the happiness, the "Christian joy." As Vanauken wrote at that time in his ever-present Journal: "The best argument for Christianity is Christians; their joy, their certainty, their completeness." On impulse Vanauken wrote to Lewis, a momentous beginning to a long, sincere friendship.

Throughout *A Severe Mercy* Vanauken shares his exchanges, written and verbal, with Lewis. Marvelous philosophical, spiritual debates elucidated Vanauken's doubts. Lewis questioned Vanauken's skeptical arguments and warmly, humorously said, "The Holy Spirit is after you. I doubt if you'll get away!" Not only could Lewis empathize with the Vanaukens' disbelief, but he could intellectually and emotionally stimulate them in their search for the answer. Davy took the leap in faith, experiencing the supreme emotion of committing herself to Christ. Vanauken could not follow her yet. Some short while later he had the realization that he had gone too far to go back; he chose to believe, confessing his doubts, praying to God to help his unbelief. A moving poem, "The Gap," expresses his simple, insightful faith.

Once again Davy and Vanauken were one in commitment. The search, however, was not ended; they continued reading theology, worshiping in the Anglican Church with friends, questioning Lewis. Their home became a place for many other friends to come for stimulating and absorbing discussions. When it was time to leave Oxford, Davy and Vanauken felt a sadness at parting but a peace-

fulness that there would be time for each other again.

They returned to the States and settled in Lynchburg, Virginia. A strange culture-shock enveloped them. Combined with the too-hot houses, the cold beer, and the semi-illiterate students, Davy and Vanauken were disappointed to discover that Christ was difficult to find in the city's churches. Faith was hollow for the so-called Christians in the community. A Christian discussion group formed at their home. In a team effort, they revealed to students the love of God and the intellectual logic inherent in Christianity. Davy put service to God "overwhelmingly first" in her life; Vanauken felt tugs to be freer, having life full and Christ only now and then. Watching Davy reading her Bible constantly and knowing Christ was her joy bothered him. Lack of time alone to redefine and reaffirm their relationship, and Davy's secret premonition of death, forced a growing breach of the Barrier. Vanauken saw Davy as holy, devoted, committed to their Christian group. He wrote to Lewis regularly. Temptation arose, and he coped. Somehow the dreary year ended.

The Vanaukens found recommitment to each other in the new year. They prayed together, experienced renewed joy in each other. Davy shared her secret, praying for one more year of life to renew their love. He was horrified; yet the glorious days following convinced him that their love was complete and their mutually intense spirituality was the spring which fed it. She painted, he taught, and they shared Mole End, their home, with Christian and non-Christian friends.

Then life changed dramatically. A mild virus attacked Davy, and her body could not regain strength. She was given perhaps six months to live. Vanauken could not tell Davy, initially, that her illness was terminal. But he prayed alone, he telegraphed and called Christian friends, and he committed himself to sustain her and be all for her. Then he felt ready to tell Davy. A poignant recollection of this time reveals two people with human tears, divine strength, and cheerful hope. When she was hospitalized, her abiding strength, her submission to God's will, and her happiness pervaded the hospital. But all too soon there was a night call to go to the hospital—Davy was dying. Their communication was supreme; her last words and touch conveyed her essence.

Hoping with his grief required unique mechanisms for Vanauken. After having shared everything with Davy for years, he felt compelled to share the daily experience of loss, of grief—all the new feelings. So he began writing to her. He also began his "Illumination of the Past"—a study of their years together. God seemed to withdraw as Vanauken grieved Davy's loss. Old questions arose; old doubts surfaced. Yet recreating the past became an amazing experience for him; he dreamed and relived in detail their many exciting, special times. In continual exchange of letters with Lewis, Vanauken was calmed. The articulate Christian philosopher and the searching Christian lover were able to glean from one another deeply pertinent spiritual questions, and nurture them to provide answers and reasons for being, for becoming. †

FORUM

Clerics Rebuffed

In your "Cross Currents" (Nov., '78) you struck the clerical nail square on his priestly head by suggesting that we "ban all 'formal services,' and drop such terms as 'leading in worship.'"

These cliches are of the clergy (whether Church of Christ or Methodist), hatched and devised by them, and add nothing but confusion to our already divided religious predicament.

True, no one can lead another in worship, unless it would be God, who is striving constantly inside each of us, soliciting us to follow his loving and gentle nature. As I would follow no man's dogmas nor permit him to lead me in his ways, neither will I permit a mere man to "lead me in worship." I prefer to manage my own worship and conduct my own services, for I am a priest unto myself. Worship for the believer neither begins nor ends. The whole of his life is one continual span of worship. I need no "priest" ordained by man to place the loaf upon my protruded tongue, and I need no "minister" or "elder" appointed by man to lead me in prayer or song.

Your "Cross Currents" are crossing and laying bare the paths of the clerics. And God bless you for your courage.

Buff Scott, Jr.
Cherokee, Iowa

Editors' Influence

Certainly we are, as Dave Reagan said ("Guyana—and Cultism in the Restoration Movement," January issue), in large part what our editors have caused us to be. I am a classic example of the "pendulum" theory. When I was first exposed to the writings of Yater Tant, James Adams, Cecil Willis, et al., I found myself moving from my born and bred position in the mainstream Church of Christ to a *Gospel Guardian*, Florida College position on the right. . . . Gradually I began to read on a wider plane and kept well hidden borrowed copies of *Restoration Review*, *Mission Messenger* and, the most vile of all, *Mission*.

I was never so taken with an editor as I was with Carl Ketcherside; I devoured everything of his I could get my hands on. I bought his books, his tapes, and drove many miles to hear him in person. I read more of Ketcherside than I did St. Paul. The pendulum had completed its full swing.

While I would accuse none of these men of being cult leaders by design, they nonetheless fill that role simply by the nature of the roles they play in the lives of the brethren. I have great respect for James Adams; he is a fine, sensitive gentleman. Among those who espouse a position similar to his, the Churches of Christ

have no greater scholar than Homer Hailey—a day spent in his company in Oklahoma City is a fond memory. No kinder, dearer man than Carl Ketcherside could I ever hope to know; a man of prayer and wise far beyond human education. But, like you and me, men with feet of clay—mortal and fallible.

Where am I now on that proverbial pendulum? I don't know, nor does it bother me a great deal. I look forward to reading my copies of *Old Paths Advocate*, *Firm Foundation*, *Christian Standard*, and *Mission*. But my life is in Christ Jesus and I am sustained by the nourishment of his word. Ultimately I must come to my own conclusions, based upon my best interpretation of his revealed will. God help me to be his and his alone.

By the way—Reagan's excerpts from "The Warrior" reminded me of some sad but funny examples [of sectarianism]. I have seen a photograph of a sign that actually read "One Cup With a Handle Church of Christ". . . . I once preached for a congregation in Oklahoma with a one-room building, while exactly next door was another congregation, also in a one-room building, both with signs reading "Church of Christ." The difference? One believed in Sunday School and one didn't, while neither had room for one anyway!

In another Oklahoma community the local Church of Christ split over a "cups" hobby and they could not decide who would get the church property. Well, the courts eventually settled it—the church building was cut in half and each group got a part, moved them, and are meeting in them separately to this day. I could go on and on. . . .

Roy B. Young
Bartlesville, Oklahoma

←CROSS CURRENTS→

A FAILURE TO
DISCERN THE SPIRIT

The United States, we are frequently told, has lost its spiritual footing. Attacks on the extent of nudity allowed the Dallas Cowboy Cheerleaders frequently fail to convince. But we now have irrefutable proof of the charge: our recent diplomatic and intelligence failures in Iran.

Unlike what the news media tell us, our most tragic loss there cannot be tallied in terms of oil, or war materials contracts, or strategic footholds in the Middle East. What we have lost is the capacity to discern the spirit of a people—particularly their soul, their religious genius. Actually, we lost it long ago, when secularism asserted its rule, and materialism became the god even of our numerically successful faiths. But the loss has been nowhere as apparent as in the Iranian debacle. Foreign policy experts at the highest levels failed to understand the power which the robed and bearded Ayatollah Khomeini wielded over true believers in Moslem Iran.

"Be our friend," we told the autocratic Shah, "and we will support your rule." But the Moslems asked, "Why do we need the support of unbelievers?" And the Shah was deposed.

"But we offer you sophisticated technology," we countered, in amazement. "We can open up your world to the Communications Era—television, and. . . ." But the followers of Muham-

mad replied, unimpressed, "We do not need the moral decadence of Hollywood in our land."

"Ah," we insisted. "But you do need our war materials." But the Iranians, still cutting off the hands of thieves instead of building atomic bombs, cancelled the airplane contracts.

We played our hole card. "We need your oil, and you need our money. Ship oil to us and we will place a Mercedes-Benz in every garage (after showing you how to build bigger and better garages)."

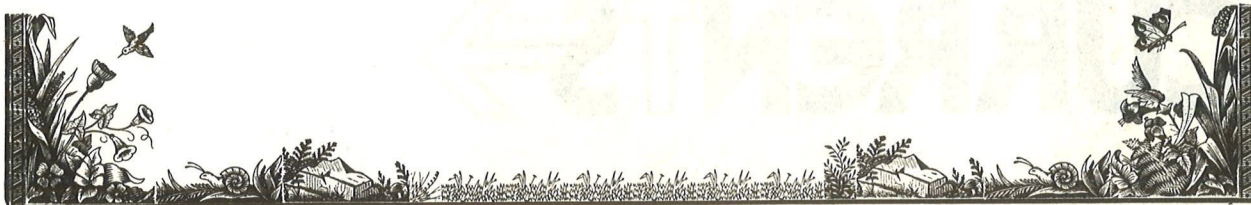
"Nay," say the Khomeinis of the world. "What is a \$25,000 car in a world which has forgotten where it should travel?"

We do not defend the *content* of the Moslem spirit. Sadly, Iran limits freedom, engages in political executions, and virtually sanctions lying and stealing as a way of life among the common people, while requiring its women to wear long dresses in the name of a morality that is supposed to be higher than that in the West. The point, however, is not that the spirits of the cultures disagree with each other. The tragedy is that our leaders no longer have the capacity to approach a people on spiritual terms. The clamor in Iran has included a call for the restoration of Moslem values. The fact that we disagree with some specifics among those values is no excuse for being unable even to hear that kind of call.

—RD



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Three Seasons of Spring



*Blue-green with God's flowers has come;
People with us smile and love more bold.
It is cause, but slip not too numb
For a pause—warmth, cool and white cold.*

*Good, gentle, quick stream from soft yellow
Rental of rainbows on earth;
Complete through piling, falling glow,
Each has due and thought for its birth.*

—Douglas Cheaney